

The Tropical Grassland Society of Australia Inc. – a great achiever

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In March 1962, Dr E.F. (Ted) Henzell of the CSIRO Cunningham Laboratory at St Lucia circulated a proposal for the formation of a Queensland Grassland Society, something akin to the societies in USA, Britain, New Zealand and Victoria, which were taking pasture science to the farming community.

About 40 interested people attended a formation meeting on November 13 and agreed on proposals for a name, objectives, constitution and organisational structure. On February 12, 1963, 'The Tropical Grassland Society of Australia' became official, the object being "to further knowledge of all aspects of the production, management and use of pastures and forages, and to provide members with opportunities for the interchange of ideas and experiences relating thereto".

Affiliation with the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science provided, if needed, use of the central office in Melbourne, business management of publications, publication of talks and news items in the Institute journals and reduced rates for members to purchase journals.

Organisation of the Society

Apart from meeting the (much later) requirements of the Queensland Associations Incorporation Act 1981, the Society has arranged its operational procedures to be as simple as possible. The Management Committee consisted of a President, Vice-President, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer, with the addition of the Past President, Editor, Business Manager, Field Day Organiser and Honorary Auditor.

The 45 Presidents have been elected from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (now Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, DEEDI) (17), CSIRO (8), University of Queensland and Queensland Agricultural College (QAC) (5), agribusiness (5) and primary industry (11). Most presidents served on the Committee for 3 years (one as Vice-President and one as Past President), to provide both experience and continuity. Usually the President presented an end-of-year address, not necessarily about pastures, occasionally about performance of the Society, and always intended for publication for the benefit of all members. Many of the 19 secretaries and 13 treasurers served in those positions for several years, often not at the expense of their employer. Nine also served as president.

Membership

Membership has always been available to any person or organisation interested in tropical pastures, without distinction between scientists, grazing practitioners, educators and salesmen, either local or overseas. A recruiting campaign was commenced after the inaugural meeting and, by July 1963, there were 181 individual and 44 company members. The number had risen to 560 in 1969, with a large increase in the numbers of rural members, staff of State Government Departments, agribusiness personnel and overseas and interstate members.

In more recent years, the number of members has declined considerably, *e.g.* in 2007 there were only 118 (excluding overseas subscribers and members), with reductions in the percentages of primary producers and agribusiness personnel (see Table 1) and increases in the percentage of members from State Departments.

Program policy

From the beginning, the intent was to provide opportunities for those in research, exten-

Table 1. Changes in Australian membership of TGS from different sources.

	July 1963		October 1969		October 2007	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Primary producers	52	23.1	216	42.9	40	33.9
Agribusiness	55	24.5	92	18.3	18	15.3
CSIRO	50	22.2	53	10.5	19	16.1
State Departments	48	21.3	87	17.3	34	28.8
Universities	10	4.4	26	5.1	4	3.4
Others	10	4.5	30	5.9	3	2.5
Total	225	100.0	504	100.0	118	100.0

sion, marketing and production to question, observe, hear about and hopefully adopt appropriate emerging technologies from tropical grasslands research and development. The format was to meet four times a year, with two members' meetings on pasture topics, a field trip to areas of interest away from Brisbane to see the work in progress, and an end-of-year presidential address. The field trips occasionally spanned two days, requiring arrangements for accommodation, catering, transport and a program of sites and speakers. Over the years, eight field day organisers provided the necessary support to ensure these trips were both memorable and valuable to those attending. These events often provided the only occasions for some of our members (both city and country) to meet and interact, and to see first-hand what they read about in publications or to inspect work in progress but yet to be reported.

In addition to the field visits to research stations and properties, the Society arranged conferences. Eight Australian Tropical Pastures Conferences have been staged, nominally every five years. While early conferences focused on increasing production from pastures with emphasis on introduced pasture species, by the Fourth Conference, the emphasis had changed to sustainable use of pastures, with greater recognition of the role of native pastures. At the Eighth Conference, the role of pastures in storing carbon was featured.

Society publications

During its early years, the Society provided addresses given by members and reprinted from the *Journal of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science*, as Reprint 1 and Proceedings 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10. Proceedings 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 were

reports from field meetings on the Richmond-Tweed, at QAC Lawes, Beaudesert, Gympie and Rocklea-Samford, respectively.

The first issue of *Tropical Grasslands* was published in May 1967 with the late John Tothill as Editor and the appointment of Don Byth as Business Manager. Over the years, *Tropical Grasslands* has been an important vehicle for disseminating information on tropical pastures, not only for the publication of field and laboratory research, but also for reviews on specific topics, as provided in the Harry Stobbs Memorial lectures, book reviews, cultivar descriptions and conference proceedings. The 'Foreword' in this issue provides a brief history of the Journal and pays tribute to the many people who assisted in bringing it to its pre-eminent position as a world class publication. Both local and overseas members (and non-members) have contributed to this success, especially by submitting papers and reviewing papers.

After 22 years, it became evident that the Society needed a mechanism to convey to members information about past or coming events, financial matters, letters from members, lists of new members, opinions etc., so the *TGS Newsletter* was born. Edited initially by John Wilson, then Kevin Lowe, Peter Kerridge and Ian Partridge, the Newsletter proved extremely popular with members, especially primary producers, who often found it more useful than the more technical *Tropical Grasslands*. In 2001, Ian Partridge revamped the Newsletter, giving it a new title *TGS news & views* and moving to full colour in 2006. Through Ian's outstanding journalistic skills, he provided an ideal forum for debate on a range of topical issues and stimulated discussion and knowledge dissemination.

To enhance the dissemination of information and to improve accessibility, the Society estab-

lished a website www.tropicalgrasslands.asn.au, which now contains a range of information relating to tropical pastures, including *Pasture Picker*, a software package developed to enable the user to select tropical and subtropical grasses and legumes suited to his/her specific conditions.

Pasture awards

In the mid-1980s, the Society decided that recognition should be made of innovations in tropical grassland development and management by commercial operators. A commercial sponsor was sought and the inaugural Tropical Grassland Society-ANZ Bank Award was made in 1987 to Joe and Pat Olive, 'Granite Vale', St Lawrence. The ANZ Bank continued to sponsor this award until 1994, when the Meat Research Corporation (MRC) and subsequently Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) assumed this role. The final Tropical Grassland Society-MLA Award was made to Stuart Coaker, 'Lindley Downs', Orion in 1999.

Financial assistance

In 2005 the Society obtained a grant from AusAID to begin putting past issues (24 volumes) of *Tropical Grasslands* on our website to increase the availability of the information and to secure it for future generations. This process has continued and all volumes except the current volume are now freely available on the Society's website, which represents a great boon for research workers in developing countries. In addition, the Society gave permission to Cornell University to include volumes of *Tropical Grasslands* on its TEEAL (The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library) disks, which are distributed to developing countries.

Other organisations to provide financial support for various projects have been: The ATSE Crawford Fund, which funded the reprinting in *Tropical Grasslands* of the special session *Advances in sown tropical legumes* from the XX International Grassland Congress; and the A.W. Howard Memorial Trust Inc., which provided a Grant-in-Aid to support the publication of the *Proceedings of the 7th Australian Tropical Pastures Conference* in the Journal. Sponsorship for conducting the Tropical Pastures Conferences over the years has been received from:

Dairy Research and Development Corporation (now Dairy Australia), Meat Research Corporation (now Meat & Livestock Australia), Grains Research and Development Corporation, Pasture Australia, CSIRO Tropical Agriculture, Department of Primary Industries (now DEEDI), Comdamine Alliance, Queensland Murray Darling Committee, Dow Agrosiences, Queensland and Northern Territory Pastoral Co., QANTAS, Dairy Processors, Auswest Seeds, David Illing Pastures, Heritage Seeds, Progressive Seeds, SBS-IAMA, Selected Seeds and Southedge Seeds.

Achievements of the Society

In response to a letter to the Editor (p. 127 of *Tropical Grasslands* Vol 40), Max Shelton stated "Achieving significant levels of adoption is a long-term process, but one that must be achieved to ensure that the resources we invest into our research can be justified by real economic, social and environmental benefits to graziers".

In my Presidential Address on November 4, 1963, I concluded "Surely great progress in the exchange of knowledge is within the scope of a society such as the Tropical Grassland Society of Australia, where farmers, scientists, extension workers and representatives of the agricultural industries meet to discuss mutual problems".

I contend that the Society has made a significant contribution to the dissemination of knowledge during its existence and to the adoption of technology. Some of the mechanisms have been the 8 Tropical Pastures Conferences, more than 100 field meetings and tours, 45 Presidential addresses, 16 Harry Stobbs Memorial lectures, 9 Occasional publications, 26 years of newsletters, 44 volumes of *Tropical Grasslands* and 107 book titles being sold. These must surely have resulted in significant economic benefit.

By our activities we have:

- expanded knowledge of the relevance of the world's grasses and legumes from the 0.2% of species being used 50 years ago;
- highlighted the benefits of lucerne, stylos, leucaena and *Macroptilium*;
- brought to the attention of others the importance of plant exploration, introduction and evaluation; and
- communicated information on improved methods of plant breeding, seed harvesting technology, environmental adaptation, seed

inoculation, irrigation, fertilisers, sowing rates and sowing methods.

While the focus has been mainly on beef and dairy cattle, there has been some emphasis on pastures for sheep. Within Australia, regions covered have ranged from the infertile wallum sands to the fertile cracking clay soils of the Darling Downs and brigalow areas. Aspects reported on include: woodland ecology, land clearing and weed management; pasture improvement; fertility decline and nutrient build-up and the role of fertilisers; stocking rates and management systems; all aspects of growth rate and milk yield; and the role of supplements.

While, until recently, we devoted little attention to environmental impacts such as climate change, carbon sequestration, over-clearing, water use efficiency and animal welfare issues, our Society has been socially responsible in the widest sense. We have continued to stress the importance of our native species, the responsible use of fire as a management tool and the need to improve nitrogen supply to pastures to close the N cycle as far as possible, and to increase the supply of animal protein for the ever increasing world population.

A major achievement of the Society has been that it provided the opportunities for contact between research workers, extension officers, agribusiness personnel and primary producers to enable the transfer of ideas and information and stimulate discussion for the betterment of all groups and society in general. This has been achieved by:

- providing venues for members and non-members to see and hear about research being undertaken and practical application of the results at field days;
- recognising individual achievement by way of Presidential addresses, fellowships, pasture awards and Harry Stobbs Memorial lectures;
- supporting the International Grassland Congresses by arranging tours and providing organisational support; and
- providing counsel and publication support for overseas pasture workers, without which they would have been unable to make the contributions which their countries need.

Through these efforts, the Society has contributed to the survival of productive rural industries, to the availability of quality meat and milk at affordable prices and to a society that values the contribution of scientific endeavour to our nation. We can look back on our achievements and know that the Society has been a key partner in the process of tropical pasture development in Australia.

The concentration in this report on the organisation, its membership, programs and publication policy is intended to distinguish the Tropical Grassland Society of Australia Inc. from academic societies. The intent of this Society has always been to build bridges and interchange knowledge, ideas and experiences, rather than the pursuit of academic excellence.

The Tropical Grassland Society of Australia Inc. has, I contend, been a great achiever.